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ABSTRACT

This study examined major issues of restructuring and cost containment confronting graduate/research universities and the application of strategic planning to these issues. The study obtained data from a survey of administrators at 35 selected "Research I Universities" and site visits to six public and four independent universities at which approximately 150 administrators were interviewed. Seven of the ten universities visited had engaged in strategic planning. Universities were also engaged in various other processes to define their future directions such as assigning task forces to specific issues. Many interviewees emphasized the importance of having a "strategic vision" as distinguished from a strategic plan. The strategic planning processes typically provided a broad context for decision making; however, most operational decisions came from appointed committees and task forces addressing specific issues. None of the universities used their strategic planning processes as the immediate vehicle for identifying programs or departments for major reductions or elimination. A review of the literature on purposes of planning includes planning as a means to: acquire accurate information, interpret information and develop a vision, create a strategy for achieving a vision, implement a strategy, and obtain and allocate resources. (Contains 20 references.) (CK)

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HOW GRADUATE/RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES DEAL WITH STRATEGIC ISSUES

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Jean Endo
Editor
AIR Forum Publications

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May 8, 1996

Frank Schmidtlein
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NATURE OF THE STUDY

This paper reports selected findings from an NSF sponsored research project. The project, using a survey and site visits, examined major issues confronting graduate/research universities and the means they were employing to deal with these issues. The paper, using interview information and institutional documents, describes how ten universities were responding to the issues they confront and the implications their practices have for institutional research. Earlier project findings were presented at the EAIR Forums in Amsterdam and Zurich and at the AIR Forum in Boston. These reports, however, focused on the issues confronting the universities and did not examine in depth the means they were employing to respond to these issues. This paper examines strategic planning and other ways the universities were responding to issues and the implications these practices have for institutional research.

CONTEST OF THE STUDY

The hugh Federal budget deficit and other economic and demographic factors are focusing public attention on the costs and performance of higher education in general, and on graduate/research universities in particular. As a result, these universities face unprecedented calls for extensive restructuring and changes in their educational processes (Breneman, 1993;

House, 1994; and Kerr, 1994).

Authors have suggested numerous approaches to help institutions identify and confront their rapidly changing environment and to take the steps needed to maintain their quality. One of the most prominent approaches advocated is strategic planning. Strategic planning involves an assessment of external and internal factors affecting an institution, and its internal strengths and weaknesses, followed by the development of a strategy and policies and plans that, if implemented, will improve its comparative advantage (Mintzberg, 1994; Prinvale, 1992; Steiner, 1979; Meredith, et.al., 1987, 1988; and Keller, 1983). However, despite its purported promise, institutions have not experienced substantial success with this approach (van Vught, 1988; Schmidtlein & Milton, 1989, 1990a, 1990b; and Prinvale, 1992). Mintzberg (1994) reports similar results from experience with strategic planning in the business world and describes many reasons for planning's lack of success.

While there is considerable literature on strategic planning processes, less has been written about other processes employed to address institution's strategic concerns. Consequently, this study sought to examine not only the advantages and shortcomings of strategic planning but also the nature of other approaches used to develop university strategies, policies, and plans.

METHODOLOGY

This study obtained data from two major sources: a survey of administrators at 35 selected "Research I Universities" (as

defined by the Carnegie classification of Institutions, 1987) and site visits to six public and four independent nationally and internationally recognized universities. Approximately 150 administrators were interviewed including: the chief executive officer, the chief academic officer, the chief fiscal officer, the graduate studies and research dean(s), the chief planning officer, selected deans of colleges, selected department chairs, and selected heads of major research units. The interviews, together with institutional documents, comprise the major sources of information for this paper.

The interview notes (and tape recordings) were reviewed to classify the issues confronting the universities and the ways in which they were responding to these issues. Brief case studies were prepared to describe each institution's perceptions of the issues and their responses. Then each of the universities' means of responding to their issues were examined. This examination included describing the context and conditions that were perceived to be contributing to the successes and failures of the various processes.

UNIVERSITY RESPONSES TO THE ISSUES

Seven of the ten universities visited recently had or were, at the time of the visits, engaged in strategic planning as one means to address their issues. These were institution-wide initiatives that had, or currently were, comprehensively examining the universities' future directions. Various units within all ten institutions in recent years had been engaged in

their own "strategic planning" efforts but these efforts generally were limited to a single unit or a specific topic. These unit initiated planning processes are not examined in this paper although many of them appeared to have a significant role in determining the unit's directions.

The universities also were engaged in a variety of other processes to define their future directions and act on these plans. These included: establishing task forces and committees dealing with specific issues, engaging in continuous quality improvement processes, restructuring, undertaking re-engineering practices, and conducting cost containment studies. Major attempts to respond to declining resources and public pressures, typically were carried out by special task forces, not as part of their strategic planning processes. The effectiveness of using task forces and committees to deal with issues has only occasionally been addressed in planning literature (Schmidtlein and Milton, 1990b) and often is criticized (e.g. "If you want to avoid a problem, assign it to a committee".). Some of the processes these universities were employing addressed a number of issues simultaneously while others targeted a specific issue.

Many of those interviewed emphasized the importance of having a "strategic vision" for their institutions, as distinguished from a strategic plan that rapidly becomes out-dated. Their "strategic planning," as reported by Mintzberg (1994), frequently appeared to deal more with operational or tactical than strategic issues.

Engaging In Comprehensive Strategic Planning

Interviewees generally viewed strategic planning more positively than the staff who were interviewed seven years earlier at institutions visited during a national study of strategic planning (Schmidtlein and Milton, 1989). Current university planning processes appeared to have learned from the misfortunes of earlier planning efforts. However, current planning was taking place in a very different environment of financial retrenchment. Planning during the earlier study often was viewed by units as a means to increase their resources. Consequently, plans typically contained many proposals whose costs exceeded available resources. Planning at the universities examined in this study, however, generally appeared to recognize resource constraints and that additional funds likely would have to come from reallocation. Plans, therefore, seemed to have become more realistic.

The strategic planning processes typically appeared to provide information for defining the broad context within which decisions were made. However, most operational decisions appeared to come from various committees and task forces appointed to address a specific issue in some depth. Major decisions on eliminating programs or units in all cases were determined by committees and processes specifically designed for that purpose, not by strategic planning processes. At one public university the planning process appeared to have created an exceptionally high degree of awareness among units about each

other's plans and priorities. Such broadly shared knowledge appeared to contribute to greater unit understanding of the context affecting their plans and priorities and provided them with important knowledge about potential areas for collaborative activities.

Those interviewed described many factors that limited the effectiveness of their strategic planning. Frequently those describing these limitations advocated planning but were qualifying their enthusiasm. Most of their descriptions of impediments to planning reiterated those described by Wildavsky (1973), Schmidtlein and Milton (1989), Schmidtlein (1991), Mintzberg (1994), and others.

Engaging In Issue Oriented Planning

Most of the important decisions the universities were making appeared to result from processes designed to address specific issues rather than from more comprehensive strategic planning efforts. All of them had numerous task forces and committees at work on a variety of topics. The processes and participation were tailored to deal with the characteristics of each issue. The narrow focus of these efforts permitted in depth analysis and more detailed consideration of alternatives. When strategic plans existed, they were viewed as providing a general context for these issue oriented planning processes. None of the universities used their strategic planning processes as the immediate vehicle for identifying programs or departments for major reductions or elimination. In all cases such decisions

were made by committees or task forces appointed specifically for that purpose. For example, a new provost at one institution had suspended its comprehensive strategic planning process and appointed a new group to examine narrower questions about the future character and operation of the university.

Reviewing and Assessing Programs

The universities all had a variety of institution-wide processes to evaluate students, faculty, and their academic programs. In addition, two had processes for evaluating administrative offices. One private university did not employ a strategic planning process but, instead, conducted an extensive academic and administrative program evaluation process that served as a basis for both strategic and tactical decisions. Some of the universities appointed external advisory committees to examine and advise some units, most commonly their professional schools.

Containing costs and seeking new revenues

All of the universities had undertaken a variety of efforts through committees or various offices to reduce costs and to locate new sources of revenues. Some areas addressed by their cost containment efforts were administrative costs, "fringe benefits" costs, privatizing and contracting out for services, faculty workload studies, tougher budget controls, eliminating committees and unnecessary meetings, and using communications technology to create a "paperless" environment and reduce clerical staffing.

Efforts to obtain additional resources included raising undergraduate enrollment limits to increase tuition revenues and seeking more "self supporting" students, raising funds from private sources including adding foreigners to boards and developing more linkages with foreign alumni, increasing income from "technology transfer" and "intellectual property", extending capital campaigns beyond their original completion date, emphasizing faculty grant potential when making employment decisions, and fostering faculty entrepreneurship.

Restructuring and Rationalizing Processes and Structures

A number of writers have suggested that universities will have to change their character in major ways that will be comparable to the changes that took place when land-grant institutions and graduate/research universities were created. The need for these changes is attributed to changing social and economic demands and the new possibilities created by information technology. Although none of these universities were inventing a very different type of institution, they were, as noted earlier, examining their missions, restructuring various university operations, and rationalizing their processes. Several were employing "total quality management" techniques (but terming them "continuous quality improvement") to streamline operations and to become more "customer friendly", particularly in areas serving students. Some were employing "re-engineering" teams. One university obtained a *pro bono* industry consultant to examine its purchasing operations.

Restructuring at many of these universities included eliminating or down-sizing academic departments, decentralizing administrative processes, reducing excessive bureaucracy through greater use of technology, and designing business processes. Several also were attempting to streamline their governance processes by creating a more effective faculty role in governance and reducing the time faculty spend on unproductive committees work.

Nearly all of the universities were re-examining and redesigning their budget processes and, in some cases, seeking to link budget decisions more closely to their planning. The concern was how to construct a budget process that better facilitates setting and implementing university priorities, promotes inter-departmental cooperation, creates a sense of fiscal realism at the unit level (by having them confront fiscal trade-offs), and provides units with the flexibility needed to effectively manage their resources.

They were seeking ways to involve faculty more effectively in setting budgetary priorities and were undertaking efforts to make them more aware of budgetary constraints and opportunities. They were reducing the complexity of their budget processes and were revising policies and procedures for distributing funds to units. Techniques were being implemented to gain more flexibility for reallocating funds, including withholding percentages of unit budgets for reallocation and having vacant faculty positions revert to deans or provosts to assess

priorities and possible reallocations. Some were seeking to increase the analytic capacity of their budget staffs. One university was "banking" unanticipated unit revenues to meet contingencies and for potential reallocation.

Improving Institutional Leadership

A number of persons discussed the importance of leadership and the efforts their institutions were making to improve their leadership. They emphasized the importance of a competent and steadfast president who could make strategic decisions and then delegate. At the same time, they also described the importance of obtaining faculty support for initiatives and avoiding the "top/down" bureaucratic model. They described efforts to replace ineffective deans and chairs and the importance of hiring and developing leadership at lower levels. For example, most had programs for developing the competencies of department chairs. In one case, a university had placed a department with highly deficient leadership in "receivership."

Improving Dissemination of Information

A major concern of nearly all of those interviewed was, what they perceived to be, major misperceptions of universities by the public, press and government officials. Some of the activities underway to "educate" external audiences included increasing efforts to inform Federal and state officials about the effects of governmental policies and decisions and acting more aggressively to correct misimpressions in the press.

Many also believed their universities needed to do a better

job of informing their faculty, students and parents about the circumstances they were confronting. Efforts to improve internal understanding of university circumstances included increasing communications with faculty and students about university concerns and policies. One president was bringing in speakers to help acquaint faculty with the "new realities." A provost brought in a variety of speakers to inform staff about issues related to the university's strategic planning process.

THE ROLE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING IN THE UNIVERSITIES

The universities visited during this study who were engaging in strategic planning were employing it as only one of many means to determine their directions and act on the implications of these decisions. The institutions who were not engaged in formal strategic planning never-the-less were developing strategies and acting on these "plans." Comprehensive strategic planning never was seen as the only way to address strategic concerns and was viewed by many persons as producing modest benefits. The literature on organizational behavior provides some insights into these circumstances.

Insights Into Planning From Organizational Behavior Literature

Beliefs about the role of planning rest on assumptions about human and organizational behavior. Most of the literature on planning assumes that people seek predictability in their relationships with their environment. They attempt to reduce uncertainty by: 1) determining the likelihood of future events and then seeking ways to shape or alter the occurrence of these

events or by 2) transforming their characteristics to adapt better to these emerging conditions. Highest priority typically is given to efforts concerned with altering their environment rather than to those concerned with modifying their practices. For example, businesses spend huge amount on advertizing while spending a small fraction of that amount on market research (Katz, D. & Kahn, R.L., 1966).

Colleges and universities, in their efforts to reduce uncertainty, seek information on what they consider relevant external and internal conditions and trends and they develop interpretations of this information to assess its significance. Based on these insights on what is desirable and feasible, they explicitly or implicitly develop "visions" about the directions in which their institutions should evolve. They then, to a greater or lesser extent, create strategies for achieving those visions. Policies and plans are designed or emerge to implement the strategies. Resources are sought to implement these policies and plans.

However, the literature on organizational behavior suggests the process does not occur in this linear, "rational" way. Misconceptions about the feasibility, and/or desirability, of linear, "rational", organizational decision making, often viewed as taking place in a "bureaucratic structure, is the basis for many unsuccessful planning prescriptions. There are a number of reasons for the shortcomings of formal planning processes that are "rooted" in this "rational" model.

The amount of information that is available is vast but not complete, is often inaccurate or imprecise, and its implications typically are unclear. As a consequence human powers of predictability are very weak as people fail to detect new data, over simplify data, filter out relevant data, and act on out-dated data. Circumstances change rapidily and the unforeseen consequences of decisions multiply rapidly over time. Given these severe limits on predictability, people tend to discount predictions of future circumstances. As a consequence, organizational decision makers, in most cases, tend to employ "incremental" (Lindblom, 1968), "emergent" (Mintzberg, 1994), or "interpretative" (Chaffee, 1985) strategies for making decisions. However, seeking to reduce uncertainty and to achieve greater order and coordination, institutions regularly experiment with less ambiguous ways to determine courses of action. Formal planning is one of these experiments institutions undertake to improve on the results of "incremental" decision making. However, the advantages of formal planning processes appear to be limited to particular situations and they are not likely to be successful unless their designs account for factors that cause "incremental" organizational behavior.

THE PURPOSES OF PLANNING AND HOW THEY ARE SERVED

The purposes of formal planning presented in the literature include: 1) obtaining accurate data on external threats and opportunities and internal strengths and weaknesses, 2) interpreting the implications of this information and developing

a vision of what the institution should become, 3) creating a strategy to achieve this vision, 4) developing a plan to implement this strategy, and 5) obtaining and allocating the resources needed to accomplish the plan. A number of assumptions underlie the belief that formal planning is suited to achieve these purposes. These assumptions and the ways the universities actually attempted to achieve these purposes follow.

Planning As A Means To Acquire Accurate Information

Institutions seek to base their decision on accurate information. Strategic planning often is viewed as a way to systematically obtain information on external trends and events that have implications for the institution and to obtain information on internal strengthens and weaknesses. The process is intended to provide a setting and process for methodically assembling and relating data from a variety of sources. New university leaders, consciously or unconsciously, employed planning as a means to help acquaint them with their new setting. Many also viewed the collection and dissemination of planning information as a means to improve communications within an institution. It provided a vehicle to share information among units and to bring facts about their environment to the attention of campus constituencies.

However, information is not politically neutral. It is a resource in institutional political exchange processes. Therefore, when planners assemble information, important questions arise about who requires what kinds of information in

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order to make what kinds of decision; who should receive and act on information obtained by planners? Furthermore, collecting information is very costly and the value of obtaining various kinds of information often is questioned. Most significantly, institutional decision makers did not receive most of their information from planners and planning processes. Planning is promoted as a means to formally assemble and synthesize various sources of information but this function also was being undertaken through multiple communications patterns in the universities rather than orchestrated primarily through planning. Officials spoke to legislators, business leaders, scholars, newspersons, and many others who gave them valuable insights. Faculty members provided most of the information on trends and opportunities in the various disciplines and professions. Furthermore, planning typically tended to focus on quantitative information which rarely provided a basis for making a decision without additional "digging" into the details of the individual circumstances "flagged" by the numbers.

The universities in this study obtained information for making decisions in a variety of formal and informal ways. One of the most common sources, as noted earlier, was the deliberations and reports of various task forces and committees. Other important processes for obtaining information were program reviews, accreditation self-studies, retreats, cabinet and council deliberations, consultants, and external advisory committees. Development officers and legislative liaison persons

often appeared to be valuable sources of information.

Planning As A Means To Interpret Information and Develop A Vision

The implications of much information were not obvious in most cases no matter how they were gathered and distributed. Various parties differed over the implications various kinds of information held for their activities and for the future of the university. These differences appeared to result from conflicting assumptions and theories about the consequences of actions and from conflicting self-interests.

Formal planning frequently is viewed as a means for setting common understandings, expectations, and directions. It is promoted as a means for continuous self examination and questioning of assumptions. However, conflicting views seldom appeared to be settled by rational analysis. They were addressed through universities' various political processes and by other means leaders employ to establish new understandings and expectations. Formal planning processes to some extent, perhaps, could be designed in ways that facilitates these political and leadership processes. However, planning was viewed by some as a technical endeavor and, therefore, conducted in ways that were insensitive to institutional politics and cultures, as well as those of external constituencies. The emphasis on a "rational" process, and on a bureaucratic view of organizational behavior, sometimes appeared to obscure participants sensitivity to the traditional ways universities have addressed political differences.

Common understandings, expectations, and institutional visions are developed by a variety of institutional processes. They may be enhanced by properly conceived formal planning processes but prescriptions for planning typically have overlooked the politics and culture of organizational decision making. Consequently, planning processes frequently exacerbate political tensions and ignore cultural constraints.

Planning As Creating A Strategy for Achieving A Vision

Mintzberg (1994) points out that defining strategy is far more complex than assumed in many prescriptions for planning. He notes that: "...big strategies can grow from little ideas (initiatives), and in strange places, not to mention at unexpected times, almost anyone in the organization can prove to be a strategist." He suggests that strategies need not emanate from the center. He describes "emergent" strategies where: "...mere details can eventually prove to be strategic." Furthermore, strategies are not static. As one looks back to strategic concepts of five years ago, typically they recognize many flaws.

This view of strategy, as "emergent", was supported by the many ways the universities were addressing the issues they confronted. They sought strategic thinking from many sources within the universities. They attempted to develop understandings and common expectations and to create consensus. They sought an atmosphere that fostered innovation, collaboration and outward vision. In some cases they sought, through

leadership, to transform aspects of an institution's culture. They developed priorities but recognized that, unless there was a considerable degree of consensus, these priorities were unlikely to be achieved. They recognized the truth of the old adage: "One who is convinced against their will, is of the same opinion still."

Planning As Implementing A Strategy

Planning seeks to produce an integrated, articulated set of results. A plan is intended to define the means to achieve goals and missions. Often a planning document is viewed as a means to exercise accountability, particularly by external agencies. A university presumably can be held responsible for achieving objectives set forth in its plan; it can serve as an instrument for control. Budget decisions can be linked to an explicit set of priorities and objectives. This concept of planning however does not fully recognize the constant change in university environments and the continuous discovery of new possibilities and constraints by persons throughout the institution.

The integration and articulation of university decisions took place through a variety of processes. Staff coordinated their activities through many communications channels, it was not primarily a top/down process driven by a blueprint derived from a plan. Such blueprints, if very specific, appeared to be overly rigid, simplistic, and became tied to out-dated conditions. Their preparation required a great deal of staff time and frequently ignored the politics of resource allocation.

Sometimes they appeared to be based on inaccurate assumptions about who made particular decisions and about the sources for new initiatives.

Implementing a strategy requires allocation and reallocation of resources. Broad priorities may be set forth in plans but the specifics of budget decisions are intensely political and are negotiated among the various interests, in many cases privately, because of their sensitivity. Resource allocations have direct implications for people's employment and status and, consequently, require discretion and confidentiality. They typically are accomplished through tradeoffs and by providing non-monetary compensation to "losers" in order to achieve a sufficient consensus.

The planning literature frequently comments on these difficulties in implementing an operationally specific plan that is valid for a sufficiently long enough period to guide decisions. Persons recognizing these circumstances, often comment: "The process is more important than the outcomes". This belief is based on a presumption that a formal planning process, at a reasonable cost, will improve on other means of identifying, communicating, and creating consensus on priorities; even though many specific decisions are reassessed as events unfold. Whether this is true depends on the nature of the planning process and the character of other processes the university employs to accomplish these purposes.

Some persons saw participation in planning processes as a

way to pursue their agendas and to protect their interests; as a way to exert influence outside of regular university decision making structures. Processes that promoted such participation sometimes created opposition to planning from those in traditional decision making roles. In a more charitable light, planning was seen by some persons as a way to "democratize" decision making.

Planning As Obtaining and Allocating Resources

Planning typically is promoted as a means to present a compelling case for an institution's requests for resources and to legitimate its resources allocations. It justifies acquiring additional resources, or reallocating resources, by providing evidence of effectiveness and efficiency to trustees, government official, and other external agencies.

At a more cynical level, a plan, whatever its intrinsic value, frequently is seen as necessary to convince external funding agencies that the institution is well managed and is making tough, rational decisions. External officials often have hope, if not faith, in a plan's efficacy in overcoming, what is seen as, the negative effects of internal institutional politics that appear to hamper "rational" decision making. At two of the public universities, state-level agencies required them to submit university plans. These requirements evidently presumed that these planning efforts caused the universities to make decisions they otherwise might not have recognized or would have avoided. State agency staff often, however, indicate that such plans are

not particularly helpful in decision making at their levels.

The universities also engaged in planning to meet conditions established by other governmental and non-governmental funding agencies. Federal and foundation grants and accreditation agencies sometimes required evidence of planning processes as a component in what they believed to be effective governance processes. The value of these externally imposed planning requirements has not been supported by much evidence.

CONCLUSIONS

The major issues confronting graduate/research universities appear to result from several trends. First, and most important, is the need by the Federal and state governments to deal with the consequences of the large Federal budget deficit by containing the growth of their budgets. Most of those interviewed clearly believed, in view of these circumstances, fewer resources will be available for universities. However, many believed our society has a compelling need to maintain or increase its investment in higher education because of other contemporary trends. The number of prospective students is projected to increase, our society is becoming much more "knowledge based" and requires an increasingly educated work force, research is becoming more important for maintaining our economic status in an increasingly competitive global economy, and investments in technology appear likely to make possible significant improvements in educational and administrative processes.

The breadth and complexity of the issues posed by the trends

affecting graduate/research universities were striking, along with their inter-relatedness. While the issues appeared clear to many of those interviewed, the consequences for their institutions, and for the actions they needed to take, were not. There have been many calls for major changes in universities in both the academic and popular presses but these calls rarely suggest the substantive nature of the necessary changes. Nor do they recognize the various costs of bringing them about. In addition, the consequences appear likely to differ for universities in varying circumstances and with differing qualities of leadership.

The universities all sought an understanding of the strategic implications of the circumstances confronting them and the options that they had for dealing with them. However, such broad "strategic visions", while important for creating a set of common understandings and clarifying the decision-making context, appeared to provide only modest guidance for resolving specific issues. Strategies often appeared to emerge as a result of resolving specific issues as well as from deliberate efforts to craft a framework for decisions.

This difficulty in linking strategies and plans directly to actions was evident in comments made by a number of persons who said the important factor in dealing with issues was "strategic thinking", not a particular plan or planning process. These individuals tended to view planning as learning, as advocated by De Geus (1988) and Benveniste (1989), rather than as a specific

comprehensive process, and were less concerned about a particular process than assuring that, through many means, participants shared a common understanding of university circumstances and priorities and were making decisions based on a consistent set of premises. Such an approach was seen as more consistent with the decentralized, loosely-coupled, shared governance, nature of university decision making. The many complexities and constraints affecting operational decisions, to a considerable extent, appeared to defy advance identification and resolution through a planning process.

The variety of processes and techniques being employed to address issues was revealing. The literature on planning appears to have undervalued the issue oriented planning that was most commonly employed to deal with specific concerns. This type of planning focused on a specific issue and the participants and processes were tailored to the particular characteristics of that issue. It recognized varying priorities among issues and focused attention on those that were most salient, permitting in depth analyses and detailed consideration of solutions. However, unless guided by strategic perspectives, this approach risks creating solutions for the wrong problem. The importance of daily decision making on issues such as cost containment and budget priorities, in a variety of settings and using a variety of processes, also may be under-estimated in the literature. Perhaps, most important, the processes employed did not appear to be nearly as important as the breadth of perspective and the

sophistication of the decision makers. As Mintzberg (1994) points out, no process can be designed that compensates for the weaknesses and foibles of institutional decision makers.

IMPLICATIONS FOR INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

Institutional research offices frequently staff planning functions at colleges and universities. At the least, they typically play a major role in providing data and research support for planning. Consequently, institutional researchers should be aware of the reasons many planning efforts are not successful. They need to have realistic expectations about the potential of strategic planning, and of the other processes employed by institutions, to address issues. They must know how to serve effectively the various processes through which institutions craft their strategies and develop their policies and plans. They need the insights and knowledge necessary to help institutional officials assess the benefits and liabilities of various approaches to developing strategies and plans. This role will not be easy in many instances as institutional leaders frequently are overly optimistic or overly pessimistic about the possibilities of planning, particularly in the face of external constituencies who uncritically equate formal, comprehensive planning with managerial sophistication and institutional effectiveness. Hopefully, the information in this paper will contribute toward that end.

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